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Food Safety Educator

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FSIS Presents a "Fresh" Food Safety Video for Today's Expectant Mothers

How do you teach young pregnant women, many of whom have low literacy levels, about safe food handling? FSIS is taking a novel approach by featuring rap music videos and real-life food handling situations in a new video, GET WITH A SAFE FOOD ATTITUDE. The video follows four pregnant women (who make up the fictionalized rap group "The 2-B Moms") as they learn about food safety and preventing foodborne illness.

A limited number of complimentary copies of the video were distributed to state and local WIC offices, high schools with on-site health clinics, state health and agriculture departments, USDA's extension service and health organizations that represent pregnant women.

GET WITH A SAFE FOOD ATTITUDE is intended for use in educational settings. The video is suitable for viewing in a waiting room or classroom, or during one-on-one counseling sessions. Viewers will learn about various aspects of food safety in nine segments, each less than 5 minutes long.

GET WITH A SAFE FOOD ATTITUDE can be purchased from Modern Talking Pictures for \$22.00, plus applicable sales tax. To order, call Modern Talking Pictures, tollfree, at 1-800-237-4599. Ask for item number 25V.

— Laura Fox ●

Getting CDC Sanitation Videos out to MORE Daycare Centers

Handwashing and safe diaper changing are the subject of two new CDC videos FSIS recently reproduced and distributed to a network of childcare cooperators. Handwashing is **vital** in childcare settings. Why? Nearly all foodborne illness, the dangerous E. coli O157:H7 in particular, can be transmitted from person to person. These cases can be substantially reduced through proper handwashing and sanitation.

FSIS publications on safe food handling were distributed along with the videos, including information on the safe handling of ground meats and using the new safe handling labels now found on packages of meat and poultry.

One mailing was directed to state offices administering USDA's Child and Adult Care Food Program which serve almost 1/3 of the nation's children in childcare.

An additional mailing targeted state epidemiology officers who frequently work with childcare providers. State offices were encouraged to copy both the video and publications.

Additional copies of the CDC video (and a CDC handwashing poster) can be obtained from:

- The Public Health Foundation, 1-800-418-7246. Order numbers: tape, VT-006; poster, VT-006PE (English) or VT-006PS (Spanish).
- The National Technical Information Service, 1-800-CDC1824. Order numbers: tape, AVA 19692-VNB1; poster, PB95-188199 (English) or PB95-188207 (Spanish).
- The costs are approximately \$20-25 for the video and \$5 for the poster.

— Dianne Durant ●

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50 million Americans, 20% of the population, are at-risk for contracting serious foodborne illness.

60% of this group, or 30 million people, are over 65.

At-risk means increased susceptibility due to age, and health status.

Researcher,
Dr. Karl Klontz,
FDA Epidemiology branch

Callers Are Asking—About Warm Weather Cooking, Thanksgiving Turkey, Storing Chicken

As summer turned to fall, Hotline callers continued cooking and dining al fresco, but also began planning for cooler weather and holiday celebrations. This list of their concerns reflects the food safety side of last season's cooking and dining practices.

1. Foodborne Bacteria. Callers are generally most familiar with and most concerned about *E. coli* O157:H7 and salmonella. During summer months, *E. coli* becomes more of an issue with callers because they are serving hamburgers more often—and often cooking them outdoors under less than ideal conditions.

Callers ask how to tell when a hamburger is "done" enough to kill pathogens that might be present. The tendency is to rely on meat color as the primary indicator of doneness, but guidance from food safety educators needs to go beyond that. Research has shown that in some special circumstances the color of cooked ground meat is a less reliable indicator of internal temperature than either a thermometer/temperature probe reading or the color of the meat juices. For example, leaner ground beef, or ground beef products with added ingredients, may stay pink even when sufficiently cooked (160°). Worse, meat stored at too-high temperatures, kept too long before use, or exposed too much to air can turn brown and look done before it is cooked enough to be safe.

Solution? Consumers should check both meat and juice color before serving

hamburgers, and should be encouraged to test internal temperatures of all meat and poultry products—including ground meat patties—with a meat thermometer. (See "thermometer" booklet insert.)

2. Gearing up for Thanksgiving.

Calls began early this year on the storage and safe preparation of turkey products. This holiday season consumers benefited from new information from a 1994 turkey cooking study at the University of Georgia.

The dual-purpose study, coordinated by the National Turkey Federation with input and review by FSIS, was designed to compare actual and recommended roasting times needed for turkeys to reach an endpoint temperature of 180° F and to determine optimum placement of conventional meat thermometers and automatic temperature indicators (e.g., "pop-up timers").

Data from the study confirmed the suspicions of many cooks that today's

newer breeds of turkeys are taking less time to cook. For example, the new recommendation for a 20-24 pound bird, roasted in a 325° F oven, would be 4 1/2-5

hours, instead of the old 5-5 1/2 hours.

We know all cooking charts are simply guidelines, and factors such as initial temperature of the bird, shielding with foil, stuffing, depth of roasting pan, and oven temperature all affect cooking time. Still, more accurate estimates of cooking time are useful in advising consumers. With a better idea of when a

meal can be served safely, consumers are less likely to serve either an underdone (unsafe) turkey or one that is overcooked, dry and tough.

3. "Fresh" Labels on Poultry. In August 1995, FSIS published its final rule defining which poultry products may be labeled "fresh." Comments received during rulemaking, including those from Hotline callers, clearly indicated that consumers do not equate the term "fresh" with a product that has ever been chilled until it is hard to the touch. (Note: Congress has withdrawn funding for enforcement of this rule.)

For several years, "fresh" labeling has generated considerable controversy. Hotline callers, however, have chosen not to focus on the controversy but on what it means to them when they get their chicken home from the store. Many are hesitant, even fearful, to "refreeze" hard-chilled poultry. The belief that refreezing increases the risk of foodborne illness is one of the most common misconceptions among callers.

Any bird should be put in the freezer unless it will be cooked within 1 to 2 days.

4. Other Seasonal Issues. Of course summer brought the usual "power out" calls, along with questions on marinating and grilling meat and poultry, packing food for picnics and camping trips, and keeping food for the family reunion or company picnic safe for serving.

— Linda Bowers ●

For more information about the Meat and Poultry Hotline, contact Bessie Berry, Director, at (202) 720-5025.



FOOD SAFETY FEATURES

From USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline

FOOD QUESTIONS CHANGE OVER TEN YEARS

From things in the freezer to things under the microscope, callers to USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline have asked about every aspect of food safety. In 10 years of answering consumers' questions, specialists on the toll-free hotline have seen a general trend toward a wider variety of issues and more complex queries.

When the hotline opened its "800" lines in 1985, callers asked mostly food storage and handling questions, looking at issues such as how long a turkey can be kept in the freezer or if the ground beef forgotten in the car trunk is safe to use the morning after.

"Our callers' major concerns continue to be food handling and preparation procedures," says Linda Bowers, the hotline's statistician. "But we've seen an explosion in media coverage of food safety, and callers want more detailed explanations of things they read and hear."

"Consumers are much better informed today," echoes Bessie Berry, acting director of the hotline. "They see food safety stories on TV and read them in print. Then they call the hotline to ask more questions or to share their opinions about what they read."

These are some of the issues that have become today's "hot topics."

Bacteria that Cause Foodborne Illness. *E. coli O157:H7, Salmonella enteritidis, Campylobacter jejuni, Listeria monocytogenes...* these were not household words in the early days of the hotline. In fact, some of today's front-page bacteria are known as "emerging pathogens," which means they have been acknowledged only in recent years as threats to human health. These days, many hotline callers know the names of these bacteria and associate them with particular foods. Callers have been surprised to learn that foods they seldom worried about in the past -- like fast food hamburgers and soft-cooked eggs -- can, like any other food, cause illness if undercooked, contaminated, or mishandled.

New Technologies. It's human nature to look skeptically at new or unfamiliar food processing techniques. At the turn of the century, people had very strong misgivings about the pasteurization of milk. Today, when government regulatory agencies approve new processes or new uses for existing technologies, the hotline may answer hundreds of questions and can count on hearing diverse points of view. Questions, many media-driven, have touched on issues ranging from irradiation of pork and poultry (which can destroy pathogens) to the use of

Foodborne Illness Prevention Materials On-line

by Cindy Roberts

Have you been showing the same old food safety video over and over so often everyone knows it backwards? Or maybe your boss just informed you that you'll be doing a short training session on safe food handling, and you have no idea where to start.

Wouldn't it be nice to have a one-stop center where you could find out what training materials are out there and where to get them?

Well, you need look no further than the USDA/FDA Foodborne Illness Education Information Center. The Center provides information about foodborne illness training materials to educators, trainers and organizations who teach food workers and consumers.

It is part of an interagency agreement between the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service, the Food and Drug Administration and the USDA National Agricultural Library.

My main mission has been to find out what training materials are out there, who developed them and how people can get them. To handle all this information, I've created a database called the Foodborne Illness Educational Materials Database. It now lists over 220 videos, posters, books, brochures and curricula to teach foodservice workers, retail food workers, consumers and children about preventing foodborne illness.

And it's growing every day. While collecting this information I've been able to see where gaps exist and in what areas many training materials already exist. I'll write more about that in later issues.

How can you access this information? The Center can be reached electronically (see below), or I can send you the database on disk. The database is in ASCII format and can be used with any standard word processing software such as WordPerfect or WordStar.

Since I'm only one person, I'd prefer people contact me by e-mail, regular mail or FAX at:

Cindy Roberts
USDA/FDA Foodborne Illness
Education Information Center
National Agricultural Library
10301 Baltimore Blvd., Rm. 304
Beltsville, MD 20705-2351.
FAX: 301-504-6409.
e-mail: croberts@nal.usda.gov.

To access the USDA/FDA Foodborne Illness Education Information Center through the Internet, go to the Food and Nutrition Information Center's World Wide Web site (<http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic>) or go to a public gopher site and make the following selections from the menus: Gopher Servers in the USA; Maryland; Food and Nutrition Information Center, USDA. ●

Donated Food—USDA Produces Safe Food Handling Video for Shelter and Soup Kitchen Workers

USDA's Food Safety Education (FSE) branch is working with the American Culinary Federation to provide safe handling instruction to food workers preparing donated foods. "These foods can be a vital source of nutrition for the needy," said FSE Director Marjorie Davidson, "but we need to assure the food is handled properly to prevent foodborne illness."

The Chef and the Child Foundation (CCF), the philanthropic arm of the American Culinary Federation, has developed a training program on the safe handling of food donated from sources like restaurants and grocery stores.

According to CCF Executive Director Pat Thibodeau, "The training in food safety and sanitation is doubly important because it helps programs in shelters qualify for food distributed through Foodchain, a national association of food rescue programs."

In addition, the CCF training is valuable to food service workers who can

earn continuing education credits for participation.

The complete CCF training program includes two workbooks and two videos. Half the training program focuses on menu planning. The other, called "Understanding Prepared Foods," provides training on safe handling and sanitation.

Under the new partnership, USDA will duplicate 5,000 copies of the safe handling video, which was reviewed by agency experts. It will be distributed nationwide by CCF along with their other training materials.

In addition, the training package will also be provided to state health departments for work with local programs.

To date, CCF has already distributed their training program to more than 4,000 groups in the Foodchain network.

For more information on the food safety training program for non-profit feeding sites, contact Pat Thibodeau, CCF Executive Director at (800) 624-9458, ext. 104.

— Dianne Durant ●

Need Information on Hepatitis?

The Hepatitis A virus has been making news lately with a number of outbreaks—most have been person-to-person, not foodborne in nature.

There is also a new FDA-approved vaccine from SmithKline Beecham you may have read about. The two-shot vaccine, however, in which doses are given 6 to 12 months apart, is still expensive and no one is insisting yet that food handlers be vaccinated.

Since food workers contaminating edible product account for a very small fraction of outbreaks, CDC doesn't think such a demand is necessary, according to Dr. Ian Williams, the Hepatitis branch.

For your information, two useful publications are available free from CDC—a short consumer booklet called "Hepatitis A Prevention," and a longer, more technical booklet, by Alter et al, "The Epidemiology of Hepatitis in the United States." FAX orders to Alice Floyd, 404-639-1563.

— Mary Ann Parmley

Kitchens—Clean and Cleaner

Everyone likes to eat. Some people like to cook. Still, let's face it, nobody likes k.p. But in terms of preventing foodborne illness, keeping the kitchen clean from foodborne bacteria is critical.

An interdisciplinary group of FSIS staff is looking at the issue of kitchen sanitation with the goal of identifying a process consumers could follow for keeping their kitchens clean.

The working group is also reviewing current literature and research to determine what recommendations FSIS should be making to consumers regarding hand washing (for how long and what

types of products to use), and the use and cleaning of kitchen towels and sponges.

If you have information on home kitchen sanitation you would like the working group to review, please fax it (202) 720-9063, or mail it, to Laura Fox, USDA, FSIS, Food Safety Education Office, Room 1180-S, Washington, DC 20250.

— Laura Fox

Retired Chefs Are "Cooking" With Seniors

Did you know seniors are ten times more likely to die from foodborne illness than other age-groups? Unfortunately, many older Americans cling to the "way they've always" handled and prepared food. But with the new foods in the market, new handling and storage methods and especially with the dangerous bacteria that are emerging, older persons need to know that those old ways have to change. Since seniors are especially susceptible to foodborne illness, they need to know how to protect themselves from the serious consequences.

To help teach older Americans ways to protect themselves, the American Culinary Federation is working with USDA's Food Safety Education Office on a new project in which retired chefs will visit senior centers and conduct workshops. Whether it's a cooking demonstration with food safety information included, or simply a presentation about safe handling and preparation of food, the retired chefs' expertise can make a difference to each of these older Americans.

USDA will supply free food safety materials that can be distributed to those attending. Seniors can take the material home and use it for reference.

USDA will also send each retired chef a list of the senior centers in their area.

— Liz Lapping



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USDA's Food Safety Education Office

F•S•E

F.S.E. is the consumer education division of FSIS. Staff educators, researchers, science writers, design and marketing experts work with scientists and officials in government, academe and private industry to produce educational materials. FSE has 15 years of experience showing the positive impact of these print, video and teleconference efforts.

reader response

FAX Back

(202) 720-9063

USDA's Food Safety Education Branch is not yet as "Webbed and Netted" as it might like to be, so we can't ask you to send us an e-mail when you want to comment on the newsletter.

We do encourage you, however, to FAX us your comments on topics you find useful, new directions we might explore and items you don't like or find unhelpful.

We are sincere in this, hope to hear from you and plan to use provocative comments—both positive and negative—in future issues. You will get a call to make certain we've interpreted you correctly before your comments are used, so please include a phone number.

FAX your views to: Editor, FSE
FAXBACK
202-720-9063.

Need E. coli prevention information?

FAX us at 202-720-9063 and request the 12-page E. coli booklet with advice on what causes this illness, how it spreads, protecting your children and more.

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